What is Claimed Is:

1   1.   A method for use in a packet network in which data is transferred over
2   virtual circuit connections each having an associated sustained data rate guaranteed by
3   said network, said network allowing data to be transferred over a connection at a data rate
4   greater than its associated sustained data rate as a function of network load conditions, the
5   method comprising:
6   (a)   causing said packet network to provision a first virtual circuit connection
7   over said packet network for transfer of data between a first user and a second user, said
8   first virtual circuit connection having a first associated sustained data rate;
9   (b)   transferring data between said first user and said second user over said
10   connection; and
11   (c)   in response to a determination that said transferring is not achieving a
12   predetermined minimum desired level of data flow, causing said packet network to
13   automatically and substantially immediately provision a second virtual circuit connection
14   over said packet network for said transfer of data from said first user to said second user,
15   said second virtual circuit connection having a second associated sustained data rate that
16   is greater than said first sustained data rate.

1   2.   The method of claim 1 further comprising
2   in response to a determination that said transferring is exceeding a predetermined
3   maximum desired level of data flow, causing said packet network to automatically and
4   substantially immediately provision a third virtual circuit connection over said packet
5   network for said transfer of data from said first user to said second user, said third virtual
6   circuit connection having a third associated sustained data rate that is lower than said
7   second sustained data rate.

1   3.   The method of claim 2, wherein said network provisions each said virtual

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2   circuit connection in response to a respective call setup message indicating the associated

3   sustained data rate.

1   4.   A method of transferring data over a packet network of a type that

2   guarantees the transfer of data at at least a requested minimum data rate and that transfers

3   data at greater than the requested rate on a non-guaranteed basis, the method comprising

4   requesting from said network varying selected minimum data rates during the transfer of

5   data between first and second parties, said varying minimum data rates being selected as a

6   function of the actual data flow between said parties and in such a way as to achieve a

7   desired overall data flow rate.

1   5.   The method of claim 4 wherein said requesting comprises causing said

2   network to provision successive virtual circuit connections to transfer corresponding

3   successive portions of said data, each connection having a respective requested minimum

4   data rate.

1   6.   The method of claim 5 wherein said causing said network to provision virtual

2   circuit connections comprises communicating respective call setup messages to said network.